Logging MicroLink

MOST communications software packages have some kind of "download" facility – a way of capturing data during an online session (perhaps a series of messages you want to read at your leisure) and storing it in a file held on disc.

However, one problem with such a facility is that if you then wish to send the same data to someone else you have to upload it again from disc. This can be a time-consuming business, and you're paying for connect time.

Of course the problem doesn't arise with ordinary electronic mail or the MicroLink bulletin board – the **FO**(rward) command allows you instantly to send a message you have received to other recipients.

But what if you have accessed, say, one of the MicroLink info files and want to pass it on to someone else with some comments of your own? Or what if you want to send a sample MicroLink session to MAG999 (the Helpline) to explain a difficulty you have been experiencing?

There are many occasions when creating a "log" file on the MicroLink computer itself, rather than on a disc in your micro, can be very handy. MicroLink enables you to do this easily.

To create a log file, key the following at the MicroLink > prompt:

>**COMO filename**

(The filename can be anything you like. Let's call it FRED.)

From that point on, everything which appears on your screen will be stored in a file called FRED, until you turn off the log file by keying:

>**COMO -END**

The hyphen is important, but the word END can be abbreviated to E.

If you then key >**F** (for Files) you will see that the file FRED exists in your personal directory.

To look at its contents, key >**TY FRED**. To delete it, key >**DEL FRED**. And to forward it to another user, simply go through the normal process of sending a message, then use the **.LOAD** command to incorporate it at the desired position.

This is best shown by a sample session:

```
>COMO FRED
>INFO AIMS
INFO AIMS
For further information, enter: INFO AIMS option
OPTION DESCRIPTION
-------------------------------------------------
INTRO Introduction to Aimsnews
SAMPLE Example of an Aimsnews session
Enter REQUEST–AIMS to request an AIMS Prompt Card
>COMO -E
>EE MAG1234567 SU AIMSNEWS
Text:
Dear Jim,
Aimsnews is a database of Government grants to British
industry. It could be useful to you. Here's what you get
when you key INFO AIMS at the MicroLink prompt. Try
INFO AIMS INTRO first:
.LOAD FRED
12 line(s) loaded
Best wishes
Gabriel
.S
```

Jim will receive the message, with the Aimsnews welcome

screen in the place where the file FRED was loaded in. Note that the file is not displayed on screen, so there's no unnecessary connect time.

One final point. Remember to turn off the log file when appropriate, otherwise it will go on recording your session. And since mainframes have massive storage capacity, you won't get a disc-full error – you could end up with a very long file of information you don't require. If this happens, simply delete it.

Gabriel Jacobs

Reply requested

A traditional drawback of paper mail is that premature burial ground, the in-tray. It's all too easy for your correspondence to disappear into someone else's black hole without ever eliciting a response.

Fortunately there is an extra stimulus you can apply if confronted by the Email equivalent of the in-tray pile-up. It's the **RR** or Reply Requested command at the TO:- prompt. Try keying this the next time you send a message, but don't forget to leave a space between the recipient's number and the **RR**.

When your recipients read the message they will be prompted by the phrase REPLY REQUESTED, followed by the Text: prompt. Because you have made it so easy to respond, this request is rather difficult to ignore. However, if you are ever on the receiving end of the prompt and not feeling particularly sociable you can insert a **.t**. This will ignore the request for a reply and return you to the Action Required prompt.

Deliberate delays

EVER wanted to impress your colleagues with the strange hours you work or send birthday greetings to a host of friends automatically? Then you may look no further than the delayed mail facility.

Messages can be posted in the present, but programmed to be delivered at any date and time in the future. Simply key-in the command **DA** (for date activated) at the Send, Read or Scan prompt like this:

DA 25/4/89 1354

It is important that the running order is day/month/year and the time keyed according to the 24 hour clock. If you do not specify a time the message will be delivered, like Cinderella's old clothes, at one minute past midnight.

Contributions

THE flexibility of MicroLink means in practice, that there is an unlimited number of potential applications. While the Newsletter can keep you informed about the majority of these, it is the increasing number of users who are discovering many of the more interesting possibilities.

So why not pass your tips, applications, and comments on to a wider public by forwarding them to MAG031 for possible inclusion in the Newsletter.

The micro climate

THE traditional British obsession with the vagaries of our climate is reflected in a newly revamped service, Weather-Link. Keying >**WL**, is the first step in a fascinating process that connects your micro to a satellite weather map. The end result is a screen image that displays developing weather patterns right across Britain, Europe and Scandinavia.

The maps are recorded by a high definition satellite camera, so picture quality is superb. However, the final clarity and colour depends of course on the capability of your particular monitor.

If you want to go ahead and compete with the Met Office, there are a couple of introductory files you should read first. Key >**WL** then **W** for a general description of the service then **SET** to set up your micro.

In order to set up the necessary software to capture and display the pictures you must first download two free programs. The WL menu will ask you which computer you own – currently it must be an Atari ST, Amstrad PCW, BBC Micro or Amstrad PC1512 or 1640. Shortly, the list will include other IBM compatibles, the Amstrad CPC and the 8 bit Atari.

The setup menu will then guide you through the process of downloading the DISPLAY and COMPRESS programs. (Mini Office II users on the BBC Micro don't need to download the compression program as it is already supplied with the Mini Office system.)

What you do next depends on your particular computer. On

A deep depression approaching the UK from the Atlantic

the Amstrad PC, for example, you load and run the COMPRESS program under Basic 2. It will then compress DISPLAY, downloaded as an expanded hex file, back into machine code.

The resulting program can then be run at any time outside the Gem/Basic environment in conjunction with the weather maps that you will subsequently capture. There is no need to use the Setup menu again unless the software is updated, in which case you will be informed by a special message in WeatherLink's main menu.

Maps are updated in rotation from Monday to Saturday, so you could collect them on a daily basis and watch climatic patterns slowly evolve. If you have a screen capturing program with an automatic "slide" display you could even give your images an animated feel.

Which database?

BUYING consumer goods is still a bit of a journey into the unknown – whether you are looking for the fastest microwave oven or the best bargain in freezers. High pressure sales techniques can put you at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to choosing the most suitable products or models.

Yet again MicroLink has the answer. It can provide you with up-to-date reports from a variety of consumer sources, to help you to make a more informed decision.

You start by keying >**PROFILE** to enter the Profile Gateway. When connected, you will be invited "TO START SEARCHING, SELECT A FILE GROUP OR FILE." You should then type the code **CMI** (for Consumer Magazines Index) which will plug you into a worldwide database of reports operated by the Consumer's Association.

At the next **PROFILE**> prompt enter the search term keywords of the product information you are interested in. This could be in the form **GET WASHING MACHINE TESTS** for example. The service will then carry out a rapid search for articles that contain these keywords and come up with a figure for the total found. If this is too high, you can further refine your search by adding another keyword in the form **PICK AUTOMATIC** for example.

You may want your information to be fairly up to date, so why not choose a particular date for the search to commence. **PICKDATE 01JAN87-,** will select only the reports from 1/1/87 onwards. Finally when you have an acceptable number of retrieved articles, you can key **HEADLINE ALL** which will list their titles.

If you wish, further information can be requested by keying **CONTEXT ALL** to screen the paragraphs in each article that contain your keywords. Alternatively, you can go ahead and select the articles you want to read in full. This time by typing **TEXT** followed by the chosen numbers – **TEXT** 3,8,17 and so on.

The results can provide all the essential information like price, value, makes, and models that you need to make a purchase decision you won't regret.

When your session is over key **END** to leave the Profile gateway.

Command macros

ONCE you get used to sending regular Email you will discover that many of your personal command patterns are frequently repeated, either when you first log on or during an online session. At this stage it's time you got to know the C-DO file system, which lets you string commands together and store them. They are then always ready for instant implementation using a single command.

To record your command chain, start at the > cursor and key in **ED**, then press Return. You will be prompted for an INPUT and may type each command, one to a line.

When they have all been entered, press an extra Return to skip back to the EDIT prompt where you lastly key **SAVE C_DO** and press Return. The C_DO file is then complete and the commands within it can be activated at the > prompt by just typing **DO**.

This time-saving technique can be deployed, for example, when you want to scan your mail and telex in one go. Construct the C_DO file like this:

```
>ED
INPUT
MAIL QSC – to list all your Email
QUIT – to exit from Email
TELEXCK – to give you TELEX CHECK
STORAGE – to provide details of storage on mailbox
(EXTRA CARRIAGE RETURN)
EDIT
SAVE C_DO
```

After keying in **DO** to activate the completed file the screen should look something like this:

```
>MAIL QSC
1 From: MAG000 Mon 25-Apr-88 21:28 J.SMITH - TAX
Read or Scan: quit
>TELEXCK
You have no telex files.
>STORAGE
26 Blocks on this UFD.
```

Of course there is nothing to stop you building up a time-saving army of macros by saving under different file titles C_DO1, C_DO2 and so on.

Free prompt card

IF you are in business, no doubt you will want to make full use of the online databases available though MicroLink. But did you know that there is a speedy way of getting to know them without ploughing through weighty manuals or hit-and-miss online experiments?

By keying >**REQUEST_BUSINESS** and providing your name and address, you will be sent a free copy of the Telecom Gold Business Information prompt card. This handy reference can be kept by your keyboard to provide standard command

instructions for nine of the online databases accessed via the MicroLink Gateway.

Each section provides a short description of a database, instructions on how to gain access or help, menu descriptions and details of service codes. The presentation style helps you to absorb commands readily and avoid wasting valuable online thinking time.

Telecom Gold also publishes a range of documentation (including manuals, prompt cards and fact sheets) that can help you to get the most out of your system.

MicroLink on the move, part III

IN previous MicroLink on the move features we've shown how you can use a portable computer like Cambridge Computer's Z88 to keep in touch with home and office while moving around the country.

But in his editorial for the August issue of *Amstrad Professional Computing*, Dave Oborne points out, rightly, that the facilities for doing this are being eroded by hotels who hardwire in their telephones – presumably for security reasons. This means that modems can't be connected straight into the BT socket, so we have to resort to antiquated technology such as acoustic cups.

It would be interesting to hear the views of other MicroLink users on this topic. Perhaps someone should start a discussion on the MicroLink Bulletin Board. Key>**BB** at the chevron prompt, select the communications category, and start the ball rolling. Maybe, with the force of MicroLink users behind us, we might be able to change the policy of many hotels in this respect.

Who's who?

KEEPING abreast of new technology isn't just a matter of understanding the latest hardware and software trends, it also has a human dimension. Just like politics, you need to know a little bit about the key people who are directing operations.

MicroLink has the answer. By keying >**WW** for "Who's Who?" you can enter a database devoted to biographies of VIPs in the microcomputer field.

You will be asked initially to type suitable keywords, which can be anything you like. For example you could type the name of the person, a firm or a phone number. Alternatively you can simply press Return and download the list of names for a closer look later. Each name has a number so it's possible to request a particular numerical reference at the Read or Scan prompt.

Each entry contains the name of the personality, company or institution, plus address and telephone number. There follows a personal history section which details track record, current role and responsibilities. Exit the database at any time by keying **Q** or **Quit**.

If you key in the name of a company, you will also be given details of any of the subject's colleagues who may also be residing in the directory. Typing **SCAN** at the keyword prompt results in a numbered list of all the names on file. Who knows, you might be one of them!